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SUBJECT: PAKTYA PROVINCE SIX-MONTH ASSESSMENT: JULY-DECEMBER 2008

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) Paktya's security situation remained stable in the second half of 2008, with Zormat and the Zadran Arc the main focuses of coalition security efforts. Increased insurgent infiltration in the northern half of the province may require additional Afghan or Coalition Forces (CF) in 2009, particularly in the remote Jani Khel district bordering Khost province and along the Pakistan border. Governor Hamdard remains a relatively effective administrator, but the real challenges lie at the district level. The lack of official status for three of the provinces' 14 districts particularly hindered governance in these areas. The groundbreaking for the long-awaited Gardez-Khost road project through the Zadran Arc took place in August, with 15 kilometers completed prior to the winter construction halt. Combined with the impending launch of both the Gardez-Ghazni road and approval won for the provincial "spine road" from Gardez to the Pakistan border, the province will have all of its major routes paved for the first time in its history.

TRIBES DECISIVE FOR SECURITY

¶2. (SBU) The security situation in Paktya was largely stable throughout the second half of 2008. Two areas in particular remained problematic: the southern district of Zormat, which has a relatively weaker tribal structure than the rest of the province, and the Zadran Arc, which in Paktya comprises the districts of Shwak, Waze Zadran, and Gerda Serai. Zormat, at the northern edge of an area of relative instability that extends to Paktika and Ghazni provinces, has long been susceptible to Taliban and Haqqani influence. The Zadran Arc also includes districts in Khost and Paktika provinces and has historically been relatively isolated from the rest of the country. These two areas were the principal focus of coalition operations in Paktya during late 2008. In Zormat, CF established a new Joint Combat Outpost (JCOP) near the village of Sahak along the route from Gardez to Ghazni, and have plans to establish at least one more, further along the route toward the Paktika border. Long-delayed plans to transfer authority for security from the coalition to a steadily improving Afghan National Army (ANA) may be realized in the first half of 2009. In the Zadran Arc, the coalition established a second Combat Outpost (COP) along the Gardez-Khost road route in late 2008.

¶3. (SBU) Isolated areas in the northern part of Paktya have also seen insurgent influence, principally directed by Hizb-e Islami Gulbuddin (HIG) and also by incursions of various forces across the border between Paktya's Jani Khel district and Sabari district in Khost. There are currently limited coalition or Afghan forces in this isolated area, though the first half of 2009 may see an increase to coincide with renewed development and outreach to tribal leaders in Jani Khel. The lessening of Sunni-Shia conflict in Pakistan's Kurram Agency in fall 2008 also impacted the security

situation in the north, especially in the Pakistan border districts of Jaji Aryoub and Dande Patan, by making cross-border freedom of movement easier for insurgents -- as well as for the tribes that straddle the border and for commerce. Coalition training of and partnership with the Afghan National Border Police (ANBP) began in earnest only in late 2008.

14. (SBU) Paktya's government officials and tribal leaders almost universally extol the efficacy that traditional tribal forces (known as arbakai) would have in opposing insurgent organizations that are not tribally rooted, which none of the insurgent groups are. Although Paktya enjoys a relatively better security situation than its neighboring provinces, Paktya's leaders are not satisfied, and view "Loya Paktya" (which comprises Paktya, Paktika, Khost, and parts of Ghazni and Logar) as uniquely suited among all of Afghanistan's regions for a significant tribal role in ensuring security. In fact, during Paktya's voter registration campaign in November-December, Afghan security forces and civilian officials alike appealed to tribal elders to provide protection. Voter registration proceeded largely without incident -- with the exception of Zormat, where insurgents were actively intimidating citizens from registering. Paktya province has strong and cohesive tribes -- notably the Mangal in the northeast, the Ahmadzai and Tuta Khel in the center, and the Zadran in the south -- whose ultimate commitment to the Afghan government is dependent upon stability and progress. The government will have to devise an effective means for enlisting their continuous support to ensure security.

GOVERNANCE GAPS IN UNOFFICIAL DISTRICTS

15. (SBU) Juma Khan Hamdard's last six months as Paktya governor have

KABUL 00000315 002 OF 003

been reasonably successful, though the province has suffered from his frequent absences from the province. The Governor is a veteran Pashtun leader, albeit originally from Balkh, and broadly acknowledged as skilled at bringing tribal leaders together. However, he complains that he does not have sufficient funding from Kabul to convene tribal shuras on a regular basis, and continues to use his own funding for that purpose. (Note: The Embassy provided the Governor a small grant that enabled him to convene two large shuras in late 2008.) In the last months of 2008, the PRT took a more active role in connecting Governor Hamdard with districts and officials in the province. The PRT facilitated the first-ever visit of the Governor to the northern district of Chamkani, provided transport for a visit to Jaji Aryoub, and plans to move him more regularly around the province.

16. (SBU) USAID's Local Governance and Community Development program (LGCD) started a series of district administrator conferences and trainings to bring them collectively to Kabul in January 2009. District administrators have few resources with which to establish authority in their districts, a deficiency LGCD is addressing. Several new district centers were constructed and/or existing facilities rehabilitated in the province in recent years. Sayed Karam and Ahmad Abad are nearing completion, Jani Khel somewhat further behind, and the PRT is set to start new such projects in Zormat, and possibly in Chamkani, Dande Patan, and Mirzaka. There have been several changes in the line-up of district administrators in the latter half of 2008, with those from Zormat and Dande Patan switching places; a new district administrator also came to Jani Khel, the most inaccessible district in the province; and a new district administrator was brought to Gerda Serai after an ineffective stint in Jani Khel and three other districts before that. The prior Gerda Serai district administrator quit in protest of his lack of pay in the fall and provincial officials told the PRT that it is difficult to find qualified personnel to serve there.

17. (SBU) Lack of funds, personnel, and facilities for Gerda Serai and Paktya's two other unofficial districts hindered governance in a variety of ways. The lack of status was less consequential, however, for Mirzaka and Lija Mangal, as these two unofficial districts have more unified tribal structures anchored by the predominantly pro-government Mangal tribe. But Gerda Serai is the home district of Jalaludin Haqqani, a significant base of support

for the Haqqani network, and contains much of the most difficult terrain in the province. In all districts, district administrators rely on the active support and cooperation of district tribal shuras, convened on a regular basis and generally representing the most legitimate authority in the districts.

A SURGE IN DEVELOPMENT

¶ 8. (SBU) Governor Hamdard has been fortunate in that his tenure has coincided with a sharp increase in development funding for the province, led by U.S. military funding and the launch of a major USAID project. The total figure in Commander's Emergency Response Funds (CERP) funding for FY 2008 was approximately \$37 million, more than four times the amount from FY 2007. Provincial leaders are well aware that the number for FY 2009 is likely to be significantly higher. Most of Paktya's leaders and elders have long complained about the disparity in funding between Paktya and surrounding provinces. Because the increase roughly coincided with Hamdard's assumption of the governorship, he has been able to take credit for the increase and thus increase his own support; at the same time, he has taken an active role in lobbying Kabul and international donors for more support.

¶ 9. (SBU) The centerpiece of development efforts in Paktya was the groundbreaking of the Gardez-Khost road, a \$98 million USAID-funded project eagerly awaited for years. The PRT has been coordinating complementary projects along the road's route, such as bazaar turnouts in the three Zadran Arc districts the road traverses and schools in Gerda Serai. The PRT has also won approval for other significant road projects in the province, including a key piece of the "spine road" from Gardez which runs through most of the province's districts to Ahmad Khel, where both forks lead to the Pakistan border, in Jaji and Dande Patan districts. The PRT portion, awarded to a contractor in December, runs from Gardez to Alamgay in Sayed Karam district. The Army Corps of Engineers portion is Alamgay to Dande Patan and the portion from Ahmad Khel to Jaji will likely be a combined effort of IRD and the PRT. The Gardez-Khost road, due to be complete in late 2009, and the spine road, which will see significant progress in 2009, will both be vital trade and transport links, connecting Paktya to Pakistan in two directions, and to the one already-paved road in the province, from Gardez to Kabul through the Tera Pass. When the long-planned

KABUL 00000315 003 OF 003

USAID-funded Gardez-Ghazni road breaks ground in the first half of 2009, the last vital link the province requires -- to Highway One -- will have gotten underway. CF will be augmented in March 2009 by an Agribusiness Development Team to help the people of Paktya develop their predominant economic activity and prepare for the commercial opportunities these roads will provide.

¶ 10. (SBU) The Provincial Development Council (PDC) meets monthly and made strides prioritizing development projects that it approves throughout the province and ensuring donors are attuned to those priorities. Line directorates at the provincial level, however, remain weak and ill-funded, and translating community needs into provincial priorities remains problematic. Generally donors, including the PRT, must engage communities directly to learn their needs, despite the existence throughout the province of Community Development Councils (CDCs). Some donors made efforts in late 2008 to engage with CDCs directly -- including UNAMA and GTZ in the Zadran Arc, USAID/LGCD in Zormat, and CARE International in Sayed Karam -- but these efforts remain ad hoc. In general, district and village leaders still have little confidence in the Afghan government addressing their development needs and seek to engage with international donors, the PRT and CF in particular, as a more reliable source of development.

WOOD